

4/78 Seattle

A SHORT AUTOBIOGRAPHY
by Rita Brown

I turned 30 on October 14th and have discovered my first grey hairs in recent weeks. I grew up in Klamath Falls, a redneck Weyerhaeuser town in rural Oregon; my parents fled the poverty of the South a couple of years before I was born. I have one sibling who lives in that same town, raises a family and works for that same mill. My mom was a passive, nagging, battered wife and my dad an uneducated, insecure alcoholic most of my life. They have both made huge changes in their lives in more recent years. I started working outside the home about age 14; my first encounter with the police was age 16 about a stolen car. Luckily, the owner dropped the charges--his daughter (my lover) was also joy riding. As far as I knew we were the only queers in the world and I had never heard of a clitoris. My parents took out a small loan and sent me to a small local business college. They did this because I was good in school and it was all they could do. I transferred to the Salem branch where I graduated with accounting and IBM skills.. Almost got kicked out of the dorm for a hot romance with a wonderful womyn; we never made it to bed and she had to stay there so I called them all a bunch of liars and squeaked by.

I moved to Seattle in '68 where a lifetime/school/neighborhood male friend lived. He helped me learn the city and eat--no strings attached and certainly no sex. Got a job in a bank balancing the savings department to a computer, that lasted nine months and then I got hired by the Post Office. I discovered the gay bars and went through changes with my bi-sexual lover (the same one from high school) until she finally split, then I became a working class bar butch dyke. I drank a lot, got even tougher and went to work every day for over a year.

Eventually there was another lover; we lived closer to the hippie-dopers and tripped out frequently, I "came out" verbally at the job. There were other queers there and we were pretty strong and took care of one another even though we never organized as such. All through this period I had several more encounters with the police mostly around traffic violations and once for shoplifting. I'd always hear stories in the bars and see bruises on the people who'd been in various police hassles--mostly because they were queer. The police were still kicking in and tearing up gay bars on a fairly regular basis. In '71 I got busted for stealing from my boss who was still the U.S.P.O. Did 7 months of a one year and one day sentence in Terminal Island Federal Penitentiary, Calif. Learned a whole lot about racism, queer hating, mean police, junkies and other such facts of life; I learned a lot from sisters there, like that self hate, disgust and feelings of helplessness experienced throughout my youth could have easily led me (if I'd been raised in a city where it was readily available) to dope and getting strung out. George Jackson was murdered--shot in the back--and the Attica massacre happened while I was locked up.

Came back to Seattle to find no lover, no home, only a couple of friends and no job. So I went through a couple of government programs and a few lovers and finally learned from another dyke that womyn are not chicks. The first womyn's event I went to was at the U of W-- an IWD conference--there was a prison workshop going on, run by some social workers who had all their experience on the outside of the bars. Well I told them they didn't know what they were talking about and I became a public speaker and the token ex-con that very day..

Shortly after this, I was at SCCC where they paid (work study jobs) people to do prison work. After a bullshit trip with an ego manical man there, a womyn's prison project was formed with a fine strong sister/lover. I was part of the politico lesbian community. I worked on lots of different projects with children, womyn, men and 3rd World peoples but prison work was always the most important in my life. In a couple of years, I heard a lot of folks in a lot of places talk about the revolution, but nobody did anything except talk. The BLA and Assata were working their asses off but nobody in Seattle did a thing. Then the SLA stormed over the ruling classes toes and met a fiery death; still nobody did anything. Then the GJB started happening right under our very noses-- it made sense to me that you just can't talk Rockefeller et al into giving up what they have stolen from the people. I knew it was time for me to put my words into action